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ABSTRACT

Because linkages between dissemination and the impact assessment systems are necessary to the effective implementation of research and development activities in the area of vocational education, the Department of Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education of the Illinois State Board of Education and staff from the University of Illinois will collaborate on a staff development program to facilitate such linkages. The program will involve staff development activities both for dissemination system staff and for impact assessment staff. Designed to focus on the roles and responsibilities of dissemination staff in implementing and administering the system and on ways of improving staff collaboration, the dissemination staff development aspects of the program will consist of a series of inservice sessions for funding agency staff members, project staff, and linkers; also planned is the development of a dissemination manual for use at the inservice sessions. Objectives of the impact assessment system staff development dimension of the program are to prepare staff development materials covering facilitation of impact assessment and to conduct inservice activities for funding agency and project staff members. Also to be conducted are follow-up activities to obtain feedback on the inservice activities and staff development materials. (HH)

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR IMPLEMENTING DISSEMINATION AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS

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The purpose of this paper is to present the case and approaches related to staff development among people who share responsibility for implementing dissemination and impact assessment systems. Linkages between the systems and among the people involved are vital elements in program improvement in vocational education.

A linkage between dissemination and impact assessment cannot occur unless persons involved in research and development activities recognize the need for linkages between dissemination and impact assessment and understand how to effectively and efficiently implement such systems. State level personnel involved in the funding and managing of research and development activities should understand the process involved in implementing dissemination and impact assessment systems in order to effectively establish similar systems within their states. Project staffs must understand what can be disseminated, how to disseminate and what information should be collected during a project's funded life to facilitate impact assessment. The need for staff development to assist state and project staff in understanding and implementing dissemination and impact assessment is critical. Staff development is a prerequisite to creating an effective linkage between systematic dissemination and impact assessment to promote program improvement.

Background and Framework

John Washburn's presentation (Seidman and Washburn, 1981) was a thoughtful analysis of the environment which surrounds the large-scale program improvement efforts which are on-going in Illinois. Conceptual and material commitments to

dissemination and impact assessment have been and continue to be substantial from the Department of Adult, Vocational and Technical Education in the Illinois State Board of Education. While efforts to design systems for dissemination and impact assessment are long-standing (see McCage, 1980), the focus on concentrated staff development for implementing these systems has emerged this year.

It should be understood that "concentrated" staff development is a relative term, not an absolute one. As the two systems near "completion" (also a relative term!) this year, the need for state staff, project staff, and others to become aware, understand, accept, and implement the systems increases dramatically. By the end of the present contract year, we expect to have made substantial progress toward creating greater awareness and understanding of the two systems, somewhat less progress in widespread acceptance among the many individuals involved, and only a modest beginning with actual implementation. The degree and rapidity of success in these latter stages are, of course, influenced by many of the organizational variables which John Washburn has described.

A cornerstone in our plan to enhance the acceptance and implementation of the two systems is to "turn over" the various stages of each system to John Washburn at the earliest feasible dates and then assist him and members of his staff in implementation activities. That is, individuals to be involved at various levels must accurately perceive the systems to emanate from the Department of Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education, not from "those university people."

Carol Sanders (1981) and Wynette Barnard (1981) have explained the general frameworks for the dissemination and impact assessment systems,

respectively. Those who want more detail should refer to Evans et al. (1981) and Russell et al. (1981a and 1981b).

Staff Development Toward Systems Implementation

The dissemination system and impact assessment system projects have several staff members in common. Also, both projects have some common clientele groups (e.g., state-level contract administrators, project directors, proposal reviewers). Consequently, some staff development activities in support of the two systems may be conducted, for example, as a part of a particular staff development session. For the sake of clarity, however, staff development for implementing each system will be described separately.

Dissemination system staff development. The objective for this aspect of the project is to provide technical assistance to funding agency staff, staff members of projects funded by the state agency, and other persons/networks/agencies (which we call "linkers") who facilitate access to project outputs in the dissemination process. Staff development will focus on (a) the roles and responsibilities of each of these groups in implementing and administering the system and (b) on ways of fostering improved collaboration among these groups.

Inservice sessions will be conducted in early 1982 for funding agency staff members, project staffs, and "linkers." A "dissemination manual" will be developed and used as a major part of the staff development materials for these inservice sessions. The draft version of this manual contains the following sections:

1) Managerial Tools and Conceptual Base
2) Information Networks for Resources and Assistance
3) How to Conduct Dissemination (based on the four-level definition of dissemination).

A staff development program will be provided for funding agency staff who report to the Manager of the Research and Development Section (John Washburn). Program content will be based on (a) inservice needs which become apparent this year in working with dissemination efforts of two selected Research and Development project outputs, (b) roles and responsibilities of these staff members, and (c) the components of the systematic dissemination model. Program follow-up with individual staff members will occur through monitoring of projects and telephone contacts.

An inservice program will be designed for staff members of the various state-funded projects. Staff development needs of project staff will be identified by reviewing dissemination planning outlines submitted with FY 1982 proposals and by conducting a telephone follow-up on perceptions, problems and concerns regarding writers' experiences with the dissemination planning outline.

The third group to receive staff development for implementing the dissemination system are the persons/networks/agencies who serve in a linking capacity. This activity will focus primarily on resource utilization and communication, two linker skills identified by that group as a need. Individual sessions will be approximately equally divided between knowledge and skill-based activities.

Impact assessment system staff development. Objectives for this dimension of the project are (a) to prepare staff development materials on facilitating impact assessment and (b) to conduct inservice activities for funding agency staff and staff members of projects funded by the state agency. The primary purpose for these inservice activities is to disseminate the impact assessment system, with the aid of the supporting staff development materials. Solicited feedback on these inservice programs will assist in determining the need for additional technical assistance in successfully implementing the system.

Staff development materials will be based on:

1) The components of the impact assessment system--conceptual, administrative and managerial, and guidelines for implementation.

2) Perceptions of the funding agency staff and project directors based on a "Perceptions of Impact" survey which was conducted in the spring of 1981.

3) An analysis of the intended impact statements contained in continuation proposals for FY 1982 funding.

Critiques of a draft version of the staff development materials will be obtained from members of the funding agency staff and project staffs. The materials will be completed by Spring 1982.

Plans call for inservice activities to be conducted in Spring for funding agency staff members and project staffs to assist the Research and Development Section staff in implementing the impact assessment system. (Please note the application of the "turning over" concept here!)

Follow-up activities will be conducted to obtain feedback on the inservice activities and staff development materials. The feedback will assist in identifying if additional technical assistance is needed to equip the Research and Development Section staff for successfully implementing the system.

Some Concluding Notes

Staff development for implementing dissemination and impact assessment systems brings us close to the "proof of the pudding." Dissemination and impact assessment are highly complex and interactive, and designing comprehensive systems for performing these functions is time-consuming and expensive. If quick fixes were available, it is very doubtful that you would be in the audience at this symposium.

Improved dissemination and impact assessment are essential to achieving program improvement goals and to keeping policy makers satisfied that public

investment in vocational education Research and Development is cost-effective. Additionally, though, we should consider some of the possible side-effects of putting the kinds of systems in place which have been described at this symposium. Holdsworth (1981) provides a fascinating account of what happens to programs and staff members when they become involved in evaluating a program based on methods requiring a great deal of staff interaction. The implication of Holdsworth's article for implementing dissemination and impact assessment systems is that the pursuit of prescribed goals often leads individuals to raise their goals, to do more and better than they thought they could at the outset, and to become generally more competent.

A final note is that our staff will be studying, among other things, the little book by Morris and Fitz-Gibbon on How to Measure Program Implementation during the coming year. Perhaps we can report to you a year from now on how well the dissemination and impact assessment systems are "taking." Stay tuned.

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